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## MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**TITLE:**  
**FOREIGN TERRORIST THREATS TO SINGAPORE:  
AN ASSESSMENT**

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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** Foreign Terrorist Threat to Singapore: An Assessment.

**Author:** Major Ang Yau Choon

**Thesis:** Though Singapore is likely to remain free from domestic terrorism, it is not immune from foreign terrorist threats. It is the author's assessment that terrorism conducted by international terrorist groups, most likely anti-Western or anti-capitalist, will be Singapore's prime concern.

**Discussion:**

Since resolving the communist uprising problem in the 1970s, Singapore has not seen a homegrown terrorist group, and conditions in the country have remained un-inviting for domestic terrorism. Singapore has, however, experienced a series of foreign terrorist attacks, and will likely have to continue dealing with such threats. Through the study of terrorism in Asia stemming from five different phenomena, namely communist insurgency, ethnic/religious separatism, religious extremism, international terrorism, and political party rivalries, the author makes an assessment on the most likely terrorist threat to Singapore.

It is not likely that Singapore would import communism and its related violence. Terrorist threat to Singapore due to communist insurgencies in the region, mainly in the Philippines, is also likely to be restricted to collateral damages.

Political party rivalries will continue to be a major problem in the various new and evolving democracies in Asia, such as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and Indonesia, and the related terrorism is likely to pose considerable threat to the region, including Singapore, as shown in the 1991 hijacking of the Singapore Airline's plane.

Intra-state ethnic tension has been plaguing Asia, with countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Philippines troubled by separatist insurgencies and their associated terrorism. These terrorist attacks, however, are likely to remain within the border of the host countries.

The most notable religious extremist groups in Asia are the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines and the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan. Aum's threat to Singapore, however, is assessed to be low, because it has not been operating in this country. The ASG, on the other hand, poses a bigger threat because of its indiscriminate kidnapping and its link to international terrorist networks. The ASG receipt of funding from Usama bin Ladin may also compel it to join bin Ladin's global *jihad* against Western interests, which are easily found in Singapore.

Religious extremism has replaced ideology differences as the prime motivator of international terrorism. Islamic radicals and the West are engaged in worldwide hostility. With the presence of numerous Western interests in Singapore, international terrorist networks operating in its proximity, and its generally pro-Western policies, antagonism between Islam and the West is a considerable concern for Singapore.

**Conclusion:** It is my assessment that international terrorist groups, probably religiously motivated and anti-West, constitute the biggest terrorist threat to Singapore.

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# FOREIGN TERRORIST THREATS TO SINGAPORE: AN ASSESSMENT

Since resolving the communist uprising problem in the 1970s, Singapore has not seen a homegrown terrorist group. Conditions in the country have remained un-inviting for such a violent creation. Firstly, the social conditions do not harbor any major discontent that requires terrorism as a tool of rectification. The people enjoy full employment and good wages. Income gaps between the different ethnic groups and between the “haves” and “have-nots” are carefully moderated by government policies.<sup>1</sup> Meritocracy dictates one’s achievements and affordable education serves as a leveling factor to allow all people an equal start, regardless of family background. Freedom of religion is also provided for in the *Constitution*.

Secondly, political stability contributes to Singapore’s tranquility. There is sufficient room and freedom for political expression. In addition, racial and religious harmony have always been the top priority in government policies. Any situations that can lead to marginalization are scrutinized critically. In fact, it has always been taboo to exploit racial or religious communalism for political purposes. Furthermore, the *Internal Security Act* permits the government to prohibit or to place conditions on publications that incite violence, counsel disobedience to the law, arouse tensions among the various classes (races, religions, and language groups), or threaten national interests, national security, or public order. Finally, there

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<sup>1</sup> The approach is to equip the less successful with the capability to compete through lifelong education and training, while allowing the elites to continue leading the charge. It is important to note that the more successful are not “punished” through heavy taxation, a method commonly seen elsewhere.

are strict and effective laws and law enforcement. The population's tolerance for violence is low. Therefore, even basic rights stipulated in the Constitution are subjected to the guidance that they must not be at the expense of racial harmony and national security.

Singapore is, however, not immune from the effects of terrorism. In 1974, two Japanese Red Army (JRA) and two "Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine" (PFLP) terrorists staged a bomb attack on the Shell Refinery in Bukom, Singapore's island off the main island. They also hijacked a ferryboat, "Laju", and took some hostages during their escape. In 1977, an Air Vietnam DC3 was hijacked over Thailand and landed in Singapore's Seletar Airbase, with three hostages killed. In 1985 and 1986, improvised explosive devices exploded at the "Faber House" housing the Israeli Embassy. Finally, the most prominent terrorist incident in Singapore was the hijacking of the Singapore Airline jumbo jet, flight SQ117, on the night of 26 March 1991. In that incident, the Singapore government was forced, for the first time, to resolve a terrorist crisis by military action. These incidents continue to testify to the threat of terrorism to Singapore today, and to the fact that external terrorist threats are more likely to be Singapore's concern. The focus of my study is, therefore, the foreign terrorist threat to Singapore.

My study is based on terrorism in Asia that stems from five different phenomena: communist insurgency, ethnic/religious separatism, religious extremism, international terrorism, and political party rivalries. It looks into the histories of the terrorist groups, the causes of their emergence, their *modi operandi*, their recent activities and choices of targets, their tendencies to attack foreigners or foreign countries, and, where possible, their sources of support. In addition, it identifies a few aspects of Singapore that are vulnerable to terrorist attacks. It is my assessment that ethnic/religious separatist insurgencies will continue to be the main cause of

terrorism in Asia. It is, however, terrorism conducted by international terrorist groups, most likely anti-Western or anti-capitalist, which will be Singapore's prime concern.

## **SETTING BOUNDARIES FOR THE STUDY**

There is not a single, universally accepted definition of the term *terrorism*. It is thus necessary to provide one here to avoid erroneously labeling all forms of violence as terrorism. Together with the definition of the term *threat*, on which this study is based, it will set meaningful boundaries for the paper.

Terrorism is a calculated use or threat of violence to achieve political objectives through coercion, intimidation, or eradication of an opposing established authority. It may try to eliminate the opposing authority, or more often, to generate a psychological reaction amongst the authority and the people, in order to accomplish its aims. Plans are normally formulated through rational calculation and executed by clandestine operators.

Squabbling about the notion of *one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter* goes on endlessly. Terrorism, in my view, is purely a tool. One must not be confused by its relation to the ideology or purpose behind the struggle. It is simply an asymmetrical tool to achieve a political end, which can be employed by a wide variety of people: a single disgruntled individual; a group with some self proclaimed political goals and with only a small support base, such as the Abu Sayaaf Group; a full-blown insurgent group receiving widespread support from the population it represents, such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE); a government using it against another government, such as India and Pakistan; a civilization using it against

another, such as Muslim extremists against the West; or an interest group using it against an international body, such as the East Timor militia against the UN peace-keepers.

The terrorist's motivation in his struggle can be political, ideological, cultural (i.e. ethnic, religion, language, history, custom, institution), economical, or psychological. That, however, is not the factor that decides whether one is a terrorist. Only when one has a political agenda, and one uses violence to achieve it, outside the accepted rules of war (Law of Armed Conflict), can one be designated a terrorist. For example, though terrorism is a common practice in insurgencies, insurgents are not necessarily terrorists if they comply with the rules of war and do not deliberately or indiscriminately victimize innocent non-combatants or those not directly in combat with them. Similarly, the mafias' use of force for personal gain, the shooting by a psychopathic individual into a crowded restaurant, or the murdering between different ethnic groups in a dispute (such as the Muslims and Christians in Indonesia) are not normally considered terrorist acts, unless they have a political motive. Likewise, a business run legally, even if it is by a terrorist group such as the PLO, cannot be labeled an act of terrorism. In the absence of violence, it can at most be regarded as a supporting act.

For pragmatic reasons, however, a violent activity for the sustenance of a terrorist group is considered a terrorist act, though that particular action itself may not have a direct political motive. Examples of this are kidnapping for ransom, extortion of money from businesses, and imposition of a "revolutionary tax" for financial income by a terrorist group. The same applies to occasional attacks by terrorists seeking identity within their group. Lastly, for the purpose of this study, the definition of *terrorist* excludes governments that practice intimidation or atrocities against subjects of their own rule.

Terrorism is thus a unique form of violence. The use of a selected individual or small number of terrorists in committing the violent act, as opposed to a large-scale disturbance carried out by a large mass of people, marks the difference between terrorism and rioting. The emphasis on the term “violence” sets it apart from a peaceful political struggle or any simple form of illegal activity. The “political objective” distinguishes it from regular organized crimes or clan fighting without political intention. The clandestine nature and indiscriminate targeting of non-combatants distinguish it from an outright war, an insurgency, or even a coup.

Terrorism often targets innocent and unrelated people through the indiscriminate use of force, in order to send the message to a wider audience beyond the victims themselves. It may also, at times, be directed against high value property. After all, political objectives can possibly be attained through the public exerting pressure on the government out of fear, or frustration, or sympathy. This is where the psychological dimension plays a part. A terrorist can hope to attack the weakness of the system by terrorizing only a selected few, while spreading fear to the mass, who, in turn, will force a political compromise from, or a change in the political behavior of the established governing authority or institution. *By utilizing the psychology of fear, terrorism can artificially inflate the perceived strength and power projection of a group among a wide number of people.*<sup>2</sup> This tactic, obviously, has minimal effect in a totalitarian environment. The people can be riddled with fear, but the government will not yield. In this case, the only way for terrorism to work is to take the threat directly to the government body itself; the psychological effect of fear must be spread only among those who can influence decision-making.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Chalk, *Low Intensity Conflict in Southeast Asia: Piracy, Drug Trafficking and Political Terrorism* (Leamington Spa, Warwickshire [England], 1998), P.14.

In determining the threat of foreign terrorism to Singapore, I look at *threat* in four possible categories: direct attack on Singapore's interests and government; attack on a foreign government that affects Singapore politically; violent activity, which has an impact on Singapore, that sustains or further the cause of a terrorist group; and collateral damage to Singapore citizens or properties in an terrorist act that is not targeting Singapore's interests.

The communist terrorism in Singapore of the 1960s and 1970s definitely falls under the first category of direct attack. The hijacking of the Singapore Airline plane in 1991 comes under the second category of attack on foreign government that affects Singapore. Using violence to extort financial gain from our citizens or businesses, or to gain control of Singapore's infrastructure to further the terrorist cause, whether it is within or outside Singapore, will fall under the third category. A Singaporean tourist killed in a terrorist bomb attack on a street in Sri Lanka would fall under the last category.

Map 1: Map of Asia



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## **TERRORISM RESULTING FROM COMMUNIST INSURGENCY**

Singapore, after experiencing communist insurgency and terrorism in the years after the surrender of the Japanese, has not since faced such events. Fortunately, this study anticipates that Singapore will continue to be spared.

The end of the Cold War marked the end of foreign country sponsored communist expansionism. This failed ideology seems unlikely to inspire any new appearance of political entities seeking communism as their alternative. The only exception in Asia, though not of great impact, is the opening of the communist insurgency in Nepal in 1994.<sup>3</sup>

The two largest communist countries in Asia, China and Vietnam, are engrossed in internal economical and political reforms. They need to project a friendly posture in the hope that the rest of the world will reciprocate. Exporting communism is no longer fashionable, nor does it serve the larger political purpose of the countries concerned. In addition, the trend towards democracy means that Maoist insurgency is still potent as a tactic, but can succeed strategically only if the state blunders or is critically weakened by external assault.<sup>4</sup> Communist-related terrorism, hence, has slowly declined. What remains are mainly pathetic struggles for continued existence by a few old groups, which were sizeable and deeply rooted during the Cold War era. Extreme poverty and insufficient political resolve to accommodate those communist fighters back into the mainstream of the society are, perhaps, the main reasons for them to continue fighting.

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<sup>3</sup> A few hundred people, mainly the insurgents, have been killed and it does not look like those communists have the capability to wage larger scale terror.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas A Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam* (London; Portland, Or: Frank Cass, 1996).



The main communist insurgents in the region, since communists gained ruling power in Vietnam and Laos, are the New People's Army (NPA, the military wing of the communist party of the Philippines), the Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB, a breakaway group of the NPA), the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM), and the Khmer Rouge. Among them, the CPT and CPM have been effectively curbed. The CPB broke up due to military repression and the availability of the peaceful political struggle led by Aung San Su Kyi. The Khmer Rouge had virtually disbanded by 1999, following many internal discords, defections, and surrenders. In addition, the death in April 1998 of the leader, Pol Pot, and numerous military defeats sealed its doom. Remnants of the Khmer Rouge now mainly pursue racist violence, especially towards Vietnamese, and are no longer a potent political force. The only sizeable communist separatists active today are those in the Philippines.

The NPA, the military wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, was formed in 1969 with the aim of overthrowing the government through protracted guerrilla warfare. It is estimated to have commanded between 15,000 to 18,000 guerillas, and a much larger number of sympathizers during its peak. In spite of considerable political reforms after the fall of the Marcos regime in 1986, the NPA increased the tempo of its military operations<sup>5</sup> and caused a variety of problems to the people, thus resulting in their negative reactions and opposition. In addition, harsh taxation and use of violence caused much resentment. Similarly, increased violence to discourage defection and to purge suspected infiltrators and perceived defectors

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<sup>5</sup> The freedom of action during the 60-days truce with the government in 1986 allowed the CPP/NPA to increase their recruitment and to arm rapidly. That created a poorly judged impression within the communists that they had reached *Strategic Stalemate* as defined in Maoist Insurgency. They thought they could battle the government on their own terms and protect the "liberated territories." (Thomas A Marks, p. 131)

created disillusion among its own members, whose aim of joining the party was to establish a better social order. Its legitimacy, therefore, began to wane.

The CPP, nevertheless, still appeals to some of the impoverished and draws a sizeable pool of sympathizers, though some of its supporters have to be kept in line by the threat of violence. It broke off from the peace talks with the Filipino Government in June 1999, after the ratification of the U.S.-Philippine Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), to demonstrate its opposition to any U.S. military presence in the country, claiming that the VFA violates the nation's sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> The CCP may possibly exploit this issue to whip up the anti-neo-colonialist sentiments, a method that gained the party many elite intellectuals in its early formative years.

The CPP/NPA primarily targets allegedly corrupted politicians, drug traffickers, and the Philippine security forces. Of whom, the Philippine military and police elements in rural areas are most commonly attacked lately, through ambushes and abductions. Some 100 NPA guerillas raided a Philippine Army camp on Samar island in central Philippines and killed 12 people on 12 Feb. 2000, while tens of thousands of workers, singing revolutionary hymns, gave a murdered leftist leader a hero's burial in Manila.<sup>7</sup> The CPP/NPA also extorts funds from wealthy individuals, businesses, and other organizations in its operating areas, often conducting reprisal operations if money is not paid. A city-based assassination squad, known as *sparrow*, has been one of its most feared capabilities. However, there is little record of the NPA deliberately targeting foreigners or operating overseas. One of its members, though, told the press in May 1999 that guerrillas would target U.S. troops taking part in joint exercises in the Philippines.

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<sup>6</sup> United States Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 1999*, p.12.

<sup>7</sup> "12 Soldiers Killed in NPA Rebels' Attack as Gunned Communist Leader's Burial are Celebrated in Manila," *NCT Global Media – WarNews OnLine*, 13 Feb. 2000.

The CPP/NPA often appears more like a mafia organization than a political reformer, because of all the extortions it commits. One may suggest that the CPP is in the stage of a *strategic pause*, waiting for the opportunity to resume its “Progressive Expansion” (Maoist Insurgency – Phase II). After all, persistent poverty and the lack of speedy political solutions continue to present opportunities upon which the Philippines’ communists can capitalize. It is, however, puzzling that the CCP has not made the most of the present political instability, the people uprising (against alleged corruption by the ousted president), and the enduring social problems, all of which are potential “fuel” to further its struggle. This may be a sign that the CPP leaders no longer pursue the ideology as earnestly as before, or simply the fact that communism is losing its appeal as an alternate solution to the Filipinos’ plight. In addition, it is evident that the CPP has been unable to acquire new and better weapons, a sign of lack of financial and other external support. The armed struggle could be continuing simply because the insurgents have been fighting for years and may conceivably know no other way of life.

Similarly, the Alex Boncayao Brigade behaves more like a criminal group than a communist organization. Its operations center mainly on extortion of money and on attacks that register petty complaints. It attacked the Shell Oil Corporation’s headquarters in Manila with rifle grenades on 2 Dec 1999, injuring a security guard, apparently in protest of an increase in oil prices.<sup>8</sup>

Still fresh in memory is the threat of communist expansionism engulfing Southeast Asia, which climaxed during the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. However, the demise of the CPM (the perpetuator of communism in Singapore), the failure of “the evil empire”, and the disincentive at present (especially for China and Vietnam) for spreading the ideology make the

importing of communism and its associated violence into Singapore appear unlikely. The Philippine communists, likewise, seem unlikely and unable to export communism beyond their border. Moreover, Singapore has developed rapidly, beyond the social-political condition conducive to communism, and has in fact outlawed the ideology. The terrorism threat to Singapore by communist insurgencies in the region, therefore, seems to be not more than the possibility of collateral damage, such as a Singaporean becoming a victim of an ambush, a bomb attack, or a kidnapping in the Philippines. With luck, Singapore should remain free from other communist-related terrorism.

### **TERRORISM RESULTING FROM POLITICAL PARTY RIVALRIES**

Singapore will continue to face the threat of terrorism related to political party rivalries, for as long as political instability remains a serious problem in the region.

There has not been an election period in India, Pakistan, or Sri Lanka unmarked by political violence. Political rivalries during non-election times often turned bloody as well. Terrorism, unfortunately, is often viewed as a convenient way to eliminate political rivals. The aim of an attack, therefore, may be to eliminate opposing political figures, intimidate their supporters, or simply create chaos to discredit the government. Assassinations tend to be wanton and highly destructive, often killing innocent bystanders and causing severe collateral damages.

Political violence has also been a problem in Cambodia for a long time. FUNCINPEC, the party led by Prince Norodom Ranariddh, and the Cambodia People's Party (CPP) wrestled for domination after the downfall of the Khmer Rouge and the retreat into backstage of the

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<sup>8</sup> *Global Terrorism 1999*, p.12.

liberation hero leader, King Norodom Sihanouk. Those two parties have had extremely violent relations in the past, and they finally fell out in July 1997, when a power-sharing agreement was discarded by CPP leader Hun Sen in a coup that left more than a hundred people dead.<sup>9</sup> The chaos that followed resulted in the largest non-combatant evacuation operation Singapore has conducted, a stark reminder of how political violence in the region can affect Singapore.

On 24 Nov. 1999, there was another major attack in Cambodia. Heavily armed gang members laid siege to the Defense Ministry and a TV station, and hurled two grenades into a petrol station. In a separate attack outside the city, an army base near the airport was assaulted. Seven guerillas and a civilian were killed in the gun and grenade attacks around the city. The Cambodian Freedom Fighters (CFF), a breakaway group of the Cambodian opposition party, Sam Rainsy Party, claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>10</sup>

Many other countries in the region, such as Thailand, Indonesia, and even Malaysia, also have a high probability of experiencing terrorism used as a means of resolving internal political disputes. Singapore has extensive political connectivity and overlapping interests with these close neighbors, and thus has appreciable possibility of being affected by spill over of their political fighting.

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<sup>9</sup> In this tussle, even the one time evil and dreaded Khmer Rouge was courted for political alliance. Hun Sen accused Prince Norodom Ranariddh, chief of the FUNCINPEC, of collaborating with the Khmer Rouge troops and marching on Phnom Penh. The coup sent the prince, who was also the co-Prime Minister, into exile. Sporadic skirmishes, nonetheless, still occur between the supporters.

<sup>10</sup> “We will oust govt, say Phnom Penh attackers,” *Straits Times Interactive* (Singapore), 27 Nov. 2000. The claim was broadcast over Radio Free Asia on 25 Nov. 2000 (*ABCNEWS.com*, however, in an article “Gunmen Storm Cambodian Capital, 7 Dead,” reported that Phnom Penh officials offered no evidence on who was behind the attack).

Richard Kiri Kim, an American who admitted to being the group’s No. 2, was accused of masterminding the attack and was arrested (“American arrested over Phnom Penh attack,” *Straits Times Interactive*, 27 Nov. 2000). As requested by Phnom Penh (“Government Blames U.S. Group,” *ABCNEWS.com*), the US government is considering the extradition of the alleged leader of the CFF group, Chhun Yasith, who was a former member of the Sam Rainsy Party and now a US citizen living in California (“Phnom Penh Terrorist Attack: US may extradite alleged rebel leader,” *Straits Times Interactive*, 26 Nov. 2000).

Singapore should also be concerned about terrorism in the form of political assassination, conducted on Singapore's soil, against a foreign government official. This possibility is exacerbated by Singapore's frequent hosting of foreign heads of state and government officials, due to its robust diplomacy and the fact that it is a choice international convention center.

Another common aim of terrorist attacks in this category is to demand the release of "political prisoners." The victim may, at times, be an unrelated party, as illustrated in the 1991 hijacking of the Singapore Airline's jumbo jet, flight SQ117. On the night of 26 March 1991, four Pakistani terrorists took control of the plane en-route from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore. The aircraft landed at the Singapore International Airport. The terrorists claimed that they were members of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the main opposition party in Pakistan. They demanded the release of PPP leaders from prisons in Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sakkar, including the husband of the ousted Prime Minister, Ms Benazir Bhutto. The terrorists subsequently began a five-minute countdown to blow up the plane, together with all the hostages in it, if their demands were not met. Singaporean commandos, therefore, had to storm the aircraft, killing all four terrorists, in order to rescue the 123 hostages on board.

Asia is struggling to come to terms with a new world order, after half a century of turbulence following World War II. Experimenting with its own brand of democracy, Asia is likely to continue suffering from political instability and violence. With increasing regional integration and interdependence, political violence in countries such as Cambodia, now an ASEAN member, has the possibility of affecting fellow ASEAN countries much more than before. Contending with the terrorism threat in this aspect is, therefore, a geopolitical reality that Singapore cannot avoid.

## **TERRORISM RESULTING FROM ETHNIC/RELIGIOUS SEPARATISM**

Intra-state ethnic tension has been plaguing Asia. It is, with very few exceptions, a legacy created by the Western colonialists and solidified during the subsequent nationalistic native rule. Historically, ethnically homogenous people largely formed the communities in Asia. There were still ethnic tensions then, but they were mainly confined to friction along common borders of different groups. Rarely had the people of different ethnic and religious groups intertwined. However, in the era of Western colonialism, many lands were forcibly acquired and people of different ethnicities were ruled as solidarities, forcing them to coexist. There was also much transmigration, voluntarily or involuntarily. Disregarded by the colonial masters, most of these people represented distinct cultures that did not know how, nor wish to live together. Moreover, some groups were deliberately segregated and were given very little opportunity to communicate, in what was known as “divide and rule.” This became the root of today’s problems.

When the empires finally fell apart, governance of those entities they created was either handed over to new political masters against the will of some of the ethnic groups, or was decided by self-determination that those in power would not honor. The new and fragile political masters also failed to introduce enhancement measures that could convince the different ethnic groups to remain with the status quo. To make matters worse, many of these political elites resorted to extreme nationalism or communalism to garner support, thus marginalizing the minorities. Where the majority’s race ruled and little attention was accorded to the minorities’ needs, discontent soon surfaced. With little hope for redress, separatism quickly emerged, and the problems heightened when the established authorities resorted to brutal repression.

More often than not, terrorism became a tool of these insurgents' struggles, as can be seen in countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Philippines.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the success of the Iranian Islamic revolution inspired a worldwide wave of Islamic fundamentalism (meaning the embrace of Islam in all aspects of life), putting secular states with Muslim majorities under great pressure to implement and live under Islamic regulations, while states with Muslim minorities face stronger demands for separation or autonomy. The return of *Mujahidins* from the Afghanistan war, above that, injected new meaning and strength into the numerous ethnic and religious separatisms in the region. In the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, India, and Pakistan, insurgencies have seen new levels of sophistication and destructiveness in tactics, weapons, and motives.

Asia is indeed beleaguered with problems of ethnic and religious separatism, and the associated terrorism. It will continue to remain this way because it takes time, and often bloodshed, for these abnormal historical products to untangle. Located in proximity of these trouble spots, Singapore can possibly be affected.

## **INDIA**

India, with the world's second largest population of more than one billion, is plagued with terrorism related to separatist insurgencies. These include the Muslim insurgency in Kashmir, the Sikh separatism in Punjab, and other insurgencies in the northeast.

*Sikh Terrorism*, an umbrella organization for groups such as Babbar Khalsa and the International Sikh Youth Federation, is fighting to carve out an independent Sikh state, called

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<sup>11</sup> There are also other separatist insurgencies, but terrorism is less common or serious. Some examples are Muslim separatism in Southern Thailand, Uigur separatism in Xinjiang, Tibetan separatism in far western China, and



Khalistan, from the northern Indian territory of Punjab. Sikh religious extremists bombed and downed an Air India Boeing 747 off the coast of Ireland in 1985, killing 329 people in the deadliest aviation sabotage in history. The attack was thought to be the work of Sikh extremists based in Vancouver, in revenge for the Indian army's 1984 storming of the Golden Temple, the Sikh religion's holiest shrine. The Golden Temple incident outraged Sikhs worldwide, including those in Singapore. It in fact led to some uneasiness between the Indian and Sikh communities in Singapore. There was no doubt that many Sikhs in Singapore heeded the call for support then, by the Sikh separatists in India, and contributed money to their cause. At present, funds are still gathered from overseas Sikh communities. It is suspected that their fund raising continues in Singapore too, albeit in a much subtler manner.

Sikh terrorists primarily attack Indian officials and facilities, other Sikhs, and Hindus using bombing, assassination, and kidnapping. Their area of operations includes Northern India and Southeast Asia. International organizations, such as the World Sikh Organization, lobby for their cause. The group, though, has maintained a relatively low profile since 1992<sup>12</sup>, except for the 1995 bomb assassination of the Punjab Chief Minister, Beant Singh, who had restored law and order upon his election to office in 1992, in a time when Sikh separatists virtually ruled Punjab and spread terror across Northern India. His assassination, amid tight security, reminded the world that Sikh terrorists were still around.

Besides the fund raising activity, the emotional tie of Singapore's Sikh community to the separatists in India was demonstrated in the Golden Temple incident. Due to the presence of

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separatism in the Shan state in Myanmar.

<sup>12</sup> *Global Terrorism 1998*, p.88.

sympathizers, Singapore can possibly be chosen as a venue for the separatists' terrorist attack



against Indian's interests. Sikh terrorism thus constitutes a mild, indirect threat to Singapore.

India's hottest spot, however, is unmistakably Kashmir.<sup>13</sup> Muslim insurgents there have been fighting for an Independent Muslim state for the last eleven years. More than 60,000 people have perished and there is no sign of peace in the near future. Terrorism and atrocities are commonplace, including assassinations, indiscriminate bombings, grenade attacks, landmine ambushes, and massacres by shooting. The government's response has been equally high

handed. Kashmir has effectively been in a state of war, and the main victim has been the local civilian.

The fight in Kashmir is further complicated by support given by India and Pakistan to terrorists operating in each other's country. Pakistan has openly announced its diplomatic, political, and moral support for the Kashmiri insurgents, though it denies any physical support.<sup>14</sup> It is, however, an open secret that many of the terrorist groups operating in Kashmir are based in Pakistan. The two great Southwest Asian countries fought two of their three wars after their independence over Kashmir, and came close to another one in 1999, when a large Pakistani military presence was found among the insurgents.

Terrorist attacks resulting from the Kashmiri insurgency are usually ruthless, and the body count is high. They take place all around India, though predominantly in Kashmir and New Delhi. Although victims have been primarily Hindus, Sikhs have also been targeted lately. One previous attack, which coincided with U.S. President Bill Clinton's visit, saw militants gun down thirty-five Sikhs.

Harakat ul-Ansar (HUA, now known as *Harakat ul-Mujahidin* or HUM), based in Pakistan, is one of the most radical militant groups among a dozen or more. Its financial support comes from fund raising infrastructures located mainly in the U.K. The effect of the "UN Convention on the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism,"<sup>15</sup> established last year, in curbing such fund raising remains to be seen.

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<sup>13</sup> During the withdrawal of the British, the Muslim-majority Kashmir was given to India. There was, however, a promise to hold a plebiscite for the Kashmiri to decide their own fate. Then again, the plebiscite never took place.

<sup>14</sup> Publicly announced by Pakistani officials from successive governments: Nawaz Sharif's government and, after his removal by the military, General Pervez Musharraf's regime.

<sup>15</sup> The convention urges signatory nations to monitor, and ultimately freeze, the collection or deposit of money that may be used to buy arms or support terrorists abroad.

One possible threat of the terrorists in Kashmir to Singapore is their attack on foreigners. Six Westerners were kidnapped in Kashmir in July 1995, in an attempt to negotiate the release of militants belonging to the HUA. An American escaped and a Norwegian was killed. The remaining hostages, one American, two Britons, and one German may have been killed, although their deaths have not been confirmed.

Although the Kashmiri terrorists have not conducted attacks beyond the Southwest Asia region, there is another related concern to Singapore. There are many non-Kashmiri fighting in Kashmir, such as Arabs, Afghans, and *Mujahidins* from other region.<sup>16</sup> This has provided opportunities for Islamic radicals to forge worldwide networks. One such network has already been seen working in Southeast Asia. In addition, returning *Mujahidins* have injected a new level of violence and sophistication into the numerous ethnic unrests in Asia.

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<sup>16</sup> Hizbul Mujahideen, the largest insurgent group based in Pakistan, has spelt out its conditions for joining the latest ceasefire and threatens to continue its campaign, until those terms, which include bringing Pakistan into talks on the conflict, are accepted.

## SRI LANKA

About eighteen percent of Sri Lanka's nineteen million people are Tamils, a minority that has long been uneasy with the country's unitary form of government and wary that the Sinhalese majority might abuse Tamil rights.<sup>17</sup> The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was thus formed in 1976 and began its armed struggle in 1983.<sup>18</sup> Approximately 10,000 armed combatants, commonly known as the Tamil Tigers, are fighting in the north and east of Sri Lanka for an independent Tamil state.

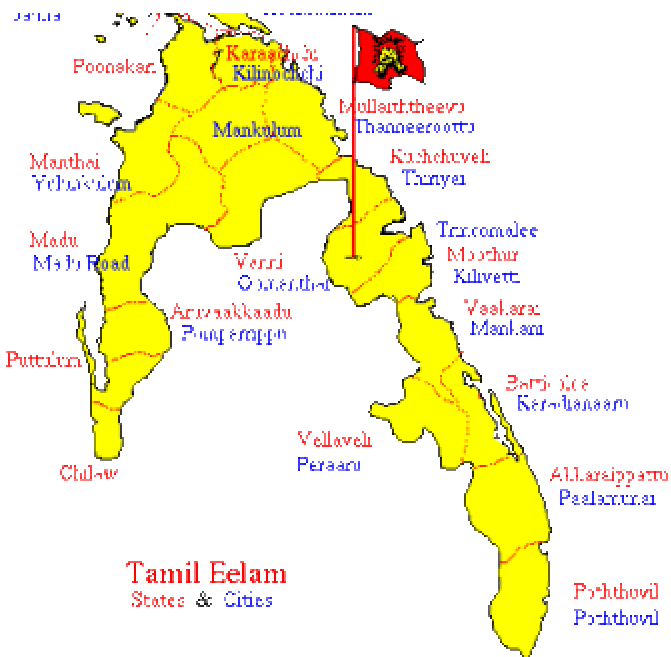
The LTTE controls most of the northern and eastern coastal areas of Sri Lanka, with a headquarters in the Jaffna peninsula, and has conducted operations throughout the island. It uses a guerrilla strategy that includes the use of terrorist tactics. It is most well known for the cyanide capsules its guerillas carry, which allow them to commit suicide if captured. The LTTE

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<sup>17</sup> The Tamils in Sri Lanka include the so-called "Ceylon Tamils," who inhabited the Island before the arrival of the Sinhalese, and Tamils that emigrated from southern India during British rule. These Tamils used to live in three independent kingdoms before the arrival of the Europeans. Sri Lanka's Tamil separatism is another legacy left behind by European colonialists, the Portuguese, Dutch, and finally the British who made Ceylon a colony. By 1833, the whole island of Ceylon was forcibly brought under a single administration.

When the British left in 1948, Ceylon became self-governed, with the ultra-nationalist Sinhalese elite assuming power. The Citizenship Act that made more than a million Tamil plantation workers of Indian origin disenfranchised and stateless was passed. Sinhalese was proclaimed as the sole official language of Ceylon in 1956. The Tamils, who had enjoyed privileged status under the British despite being the minority, therefore, started toying with the idea of a separate Tamil state. When Ceylon became a Republic on 22 May 1972 and renamed itself the Republic of Sri Lanka, the United Front government enacted a Sinhalese-supremacist "Republican Constitution" for the country. It made Buddhism the de facto state religion. At the same time, there were sporadic atrocities by the nationalistic Sinhalese and retaliations from the Tamils.

<sup>18</sup> An accord was signed on 29 Jul. 1987 by the then Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and Sri Lanka President, Jayewardene. It got the Sri Lankan Government to make a number of concessions to Tamil demands, which included devolution of power to the provinces, merger (subject to later referendum) of the northern and eastern provinces, and official status for the Tamil language. India then agreed to help establish order in the north and east of Sri Lanka with an Indian Peace-keeping Force (IPKF) and to cease assisting the Tamil insurgents. Tamil militant groups, although initially reluctant, agreed to surrender their arms to the IPKF. Within weeks, however, the LTTE declared its intent to continue its armed struggle for an independent Tamil Eelam and refused to surrender their arms. The 50,000-strong IPKF, thus, found itself engaged in a bloody police action against the LTTE. Finally, India withdrew all its forces from Sri Lanka by May 1990, and fighting between the LTTE and the government recommenced. Both LTTE and government forces have been accused of serious human rights violations and the estimated death toll from the 18-year conflict is 64,000.



terrorists' targets include politicians, police, military, and civilians. Infrastructures such as power plants and government buildings are also regularly attacked.



The LTTE wishes to establish an independent state of Tamil Eelam as shown in the colored portion of the map. It currently controls Jaffna and some coastal areas on the east of Sri Lanka.

Map 3

The LTTE commonly uses assassination and bombing, especially car bombing, to create terror. Suicide bombers are frequently employed. Its indiscriminate attacks in public places often result in heavy casualties of innocent people, even when a specific target of assassination is designated. Examples of such attacks include the 1993 suicide attack against Sri Lankan President, Ranasinghe Premadasa, and the 1991 attack against Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi.

In 1996, the LTTE exploded a truck bomb near the Central Bank in Colombo, killing some ninety people; bombed a commuter train, killing seventy people; and ambushed a bus, killing eleven civilians. The group also staged a suicide bomb attack on the Minister of Housing in Jaffna. Although the minister survived, twenty-five persons, including a Brigadier General, were killed. The LTTE's most spectacular terrorist attack in 1997 was the truck bombing of the newly opened Colombo World Trade Center, injuring more than 100 persons, including many foreigners, and killing 18. Its deadliest terrorist act in 1998 was a vehicle bomb explosion in the Maradana district of Colombo, in March, that killed 36 persons and wounded more than 250 others. In 1999, it conducted numerous attacks on infrastructure and commercial shipping, bombed buses, trains, and bus terminals. A suicide diver bomber was even employed to attack a civilian passenger ferry. The current Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, was in fact seriously wounded in an assassination attempt by the LTTE before the December 1999 presidential election that she won.

The LTTE has refrained from deliberately targeting foreign tourists, out of fear that foreign governments would crack down on Tamil expatriates involved in fundraising activities abroad. Its international contacts also help to procure weapons, communications, and bomb-

making equipment. In addition, overt organizations support the Tamil separatist movement by lobbying foreign governments and the United Nations.

The large Tamil communities in North America, Europe, and Asia are also exploited to obtain funds and supplies, and to propagandize its cause. The best example can be found in Canada, where LTTE supporters and overt wings, such as the World Tamil Movement, openly raise funds, distribute propaganda, and even parade to celebrate occasional victory of the armed insurrection. It is estimated that between \$7 million and \$22 million dollars a year is raised in Canada alone, for the support of the guerrillas.<sup>19</sup> Canadian law, at present, does not prohibit such activities, but that may soon change, because Canada too has become a signatory of the “UN Convention on the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism.”

Some Tamil communities in Europe are involved in narcotics smuggling.<sup>20</sup> Reports also indicate that the LTTE has tried setting up bogus front companies in Singapore and Malaysia as a means of “money laundering.” There are, in addition, unconfirmed rumors that the LTTE maintains strong business relations with the affluent minority of Tamils in the region to gain credibility for themselves. A 13-man clandestine network in Singapore, headed by a Singaporean, which raised funds and conducted other activities in support of the LTTE, was busted last year.<sup>21</sup>

The LTTE has not conducted terrorist attacks on foreign land, apart from its regular support activities, and has not attacked foreigners intentionally. The widespread, notoriously indiscriminate, and brutal form of terrorism perpetuated by the LTTE in Sri Lanka, however, can

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<sup>19</sup> “Canada’s Tamils Work for a Homeland From Afar,” *The New York Times*, 16 Jul. 2000, International Section.

<sup>20</sup> *Global Terrorism 1998*, p.75.

<sup>21</sup> “Singaporean Who Ran Support network for Tamil Tiger under probe,” *Straits Times Interactive* (Singapore), 14 Mar. 2001.



still pose some indirect threat to Singapore. The increasing presence of Singapore's businesses and tourists in Sri Lanka elevates the possibility of a Singaporean interest or citizen falling victim or suffering from collateral damage. There might also be threat to Singapore's shipping activities in the vicinity of the Indian Ocean, since the LTTE operates its own small navy, declares an exclusive zone in the water within its control, and occasionally attacks commercial shipping. Lastly, reports of the Sri Lankan Government's troops suppression of the LTTE also evidently disturbed Singapore's Tamil community. This shows the sympathy that Singaporeans have for the LTTE, which may translate into some form of support for its fight.

## INDONESIA

Similarly, Dutch colonialists forcibly put together the state that subsequently became Indonesia and left behind various historical problems.<sup>22</sup> The current dividing line between East and West Timor was, for example, created out of a stalemate, when the Dutch tried to evict the Portuguese. East Timor was never a part of the Netherlands Indies. It was only invaded and annexed by Indonesia in 1975-76, at the height of the Cold War.<sup>23</sup>

Irian Jaya (West Papua), though part of the Dutch Indies, had been separated artificially from it by the Dutch since 1949, and was developed as a separate colony until 1963.<sup>24</sup> It only

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<sup>22</sup> Though Indonesia was loosely ruled as a kingdom in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, this state of 13,000 islands did not exist until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The archipelago was divided, upon their arrival, amongst the Dutch, British, and Portuguese colonialists, and amongst independent indigenous states of more than 200 distinct ethnic groups. (Robert Cribb and Colin Brown, *Modern Indonesia: A History Since 1945*, page 1)

The Dutch subsequently expelled their rivals or exchanged their possessions with other European colonialists, subdued the indigenous societies, and created the colonial state of the Dutch Indies (The British relinquished all their claims in the Dutch Indies in exchange for Netherlands's possessions, such as Malacca, on the Malaya peninsula).

<sup>23</sup> The invasion, to forestall the possible establishment of an independent left-wing government, actually received overt support from the international community.

<sup>24</sup> Upon the Japanese surrender in 1945, Indonesian nationalists, led by Sukarno, declared independence. The Dutch returned and re-invaded part of the land, and a 4-year war of independence ensued. They finally backed down and recognized the Indonesian independence reluctantly in 1949, under an increasingly unmanageable war and



Map 4: Map of Indonesia

officially joined Indonesia, amid some resistance, after a referendum in 1969. In fact, an unrecognized declaration of independence was even made in 1961 by separatists during the Dutch rule. Furthermore, nationalism in Irian Jaya and East Timor was partly a consequence of deliberate anti-Indonesian campaigning by the colonial powers before the Indonesian takeover.<sup>25</sup> Then there is Aceh, the most aggressive seeker of independence among the separative provinces, which has never been totally subdued even during the Dutch time.

None of these three provinces gains a great deal economically from its connection with Indonesia. A foremost cause of local dissatisfaction, in fact, is the exploitation of the provinces' major exports, which are mainly copper, timber, oil, and gas in the case of Irian Jaya, coffee and sandalwood for East Timor, and oil and natural gas for Aceh. Most of the benefits derived from this exploitation are enjoyed by non-locals, primarily Javanese. Ousted President Suharto's granting of timber, mining, and drilling concessions to companies related to his family and cronies is just one example. In addition, human rights violations in the course of suppressing

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tremendous international pressure. Western New Guinea (Irian Jaya), however, remained under Dutch control until 1963.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Cribb and Colin Brown, *Modern Indonesia: A History Since 1945* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1995).

dissenters also cause much resentment. Massive Javanese resettlement initiated under state-sponsored transmigration schemes causes tremendous friction too.

East Timor set the precedent when it gained its independence through a plebiscite on 30 Aug. 1999, after much bloodshed. Irian Jaya has also experienced intensified separatism, spearheaded by the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, OPM), and more violence is on the horizon in the staunchly Islamic Aceh.

It is in Aceh where terrorism is most frequently seen. Its opposition to Jakarta's rule initially surfaced through the *Darul Islam*, which aimed not for Acehnese independence, but rather for the transformation of Indonesia into an Islamic state. This opposition later took on a different character under the direction of the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka), which seeks Acehnese independence from Indonesia.

Acehnese separatists have been fighting for independence since 1976, and at least 5,500 people have been killed in the past decade. The separatists, demanding a referendum on Aceh independence, have primarily attacked Indonesian targets. The National Liberation Front - Aceh Sumatra, a violent offshoot of Aceh Merdeka, has carried out a number of extremely brutal mass attacks against Javanese civilians who had been resettled in Aceh. This terrorist group became especially notorious for deliberately dismembering its captives while they were still alive. Despite an unprecedented truce agreed upon in Geneva, in June 2000, the violence has continued and more than 200 people have died since that date.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Struggling to keep his multi-ethnic country intact, Indonesian President, Abdurrahman Wahid, has promised greater autonomy for Aceh, including the implementation of Islamic Shariah law in the territory. The local Parliament, however, has demanded, in addition, that eighty percent of profits from Aceh's natural resources be controlled by Aceh, and not Jakarta. This is something that will require a lot of compromise from Jakarta. The representatives of both sides finally met in Geneva on 5 Jan. 2000 after several hiccups. The result of the peace talks remains to be seen and there is not a lot of optimism.

Terrorist attacks in Indonesia tend to be quite primitive, though savage. Attacks by knives and machetes are common, although firearms are also used. Lately, low-grade home made bombs have also become more common. A *Mujahidin* who fought in Afghanistan was recently arrested for his Christmas Eve bomb attack in Jakarta.<sup>27</sup>

The fighting in Indonesia remains local and there has been no deliberate targeting of foreigners, except for two of the kidnappings in Irian Jaya. Separatist fighters in Irian Jaya, on 17 Jan. 2001, held twelve timber workers hostage, including a Korean, and demanded one million dollars in ransom. Indonesian authorities, however, alleged that the incident was a staged drama, citing evidence of close contacts between the rebel and the company in question. All the hostages have since been released.<sup>28</sup>

It is, nonetheless, possible that Singapore be attacked to force certain issues or simply to cause embarrassment to the Indonesian government. For example, terrorist attacks could be directed at Singapore to deter it from providing economic, financial, and political support to the Indonesian government, in order to weaken the regime's credibility. A depressed and chaotic Indonesia and a weak government present the best opportunity for the separatists to succeed in their endeavors.

That aside, rebels have been reported to be moving between Aceh and West Malaysia. There have been alleged criminal activities and quasi-legal business transactions conducted in support of the separatists. Singapore too can be affected in the same manner, although there has

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<sup>27</sup> "Christmas Bomb Suspects Trained in Afghanistan, Say Police," *Straits Times Interactive (Singapore)*, 5 Jan. 2001.

<sup>28</sup> In May 1996, 11 hostages, including six Europeans, were held for four months by Irian Jaya separatists. Two of the Indonesian hostages were killed while the others were released by a military operation ("Irian separatists held 12 hostages, demanded \$1 million," *Asian Business News* [Singapore], 17 Jan. 2001).

not been any concrete evidence of that happening. There are also other concerns, such as the possibility of increase in pirate attacks and influx of refugees or illegal immigrants.

There is also a concern that Indonesian political elites may externalize their problems in order to coalesce domestic support through ultra nationalism. Singapore, being a small country in proximity to Indonesia, can easily fall victim to such exploits. Indonesian leaders and politicians have, in the past, proven their capabilities and inclinations to resort to this easy way of gaining support, as illustrated in the 1963 *Konfrontasi* carried out by the order of Sukarno. Indonesian masses, moreover, have time and again demonstrated their susceptibility to be mobilized for violence. There were indicators of such a recurrence recently, in the form of foreign conspiracy theories. Current and former Indonesian Presidents have openly accused Singapore of causing Indonesia's poor economic performance. With such instigated hatred, it is possible for terrorist attacks to be incited.

## **THE PHILIPPINES**

Inhabitants on the Philippines were Muslims living in separate communities before the arrival of the colonialists. Only with Spanish conquest did the Philippines become one political unit and the people convert to Catholics. The defiant people in the south, though, held on to their Islamic faith, during both Spanish and American rule. When the Americans left in 1946, political power fell into the hands of the majority Catholics, together with the Southern lands. The Muslims saw that as the end of their chance for freedom and self-determination.

The Moroland, as the Muslim knows the Southern Philippines, is rich in natural resources and has fertile soil. Yet, it is severely lacking in economic development because of neglect by the Manila government. In spite of a third of the nation's trade coming from output in the south,

per capita income there is one fifth of the national average. That has embedded, in the Muslims, a feeling of government exploitation. Furthermore, land distribution laws and transmigration of Catholics from the north are seen to be encroachment of the land to the detriment of the indigenous people. In addition, the Muslims complain of oppression by the government. All of this led to the emergence of Muslim separatism in Southern Philippines.

In 1996, the Philippines' government concluded, and began implementing, a peace agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) leader, Nur Misauri, who was the de facto leader of the separatist movement. But the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), an offshoot of the MNLF, and the more radical Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) refused to accept the agreement, thus continuing their fighting for an independent Islamic state. Both groups claimed that the agreement betrayed the real wishes of Muslims in the Southern Philippines, because it did not address their main complaints, which are the usurpation of their ancestral-homeland and their legitimate right to freedom and self-determination. On the other hand, the Philippine Government is frustrated that the compromises it makes never seem to satisfy the separatists.

The MILF has engaged in assassination and bombing, their targets usually being the Philippines' military and police. About a hundred Muslim rebels fired rocket-propelled grenades at a southern Philippine jail in December 2000, for



example, freeing a rebel leader and sixty-seven other prisoners in a daring assault. The MILF also kidnaps for ransom.

Peace talks between the government and the MILF, which began on 25 October 1999, were abruptly called off in January 2001, because the government accused the MILF of a series of five bomb attacks in Manila on 30 December 2000. Twenty-two people were killed and 124 others injured, in simultaneous bombings of an elevated train, a bus terminal, a warehouse at Manila airport, a park near the United States embassy, and the outside of a luxury hotel. Although the MILF denied responsibility, charges were pressed against six of its leaders in absentia, while a seventh was arrested.

Apart from the kidnapping of some foreigners, the MILF separatist insurgency in Mindanao does not directly affect other countries.<sup>29</sup> Although unfortunate Singaporean individuals may be kidnapped for ransom, and the possibility of collateral damages or injuries during MILF attacks exists, there does not seem to be any good reason for these Filipino Muslim terrorist groups to attack Singapore. The MILF connection to radical Islamic militants, however, causes much concern to the entire region. MILF chief, Hashim Salamat, told the press in February 2000 that the group had received funds from Usama bin Ladin, which it used to build mosques, health centers, and schools in Muslim communities.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> There is one exception, Malaysia. There have been allegations that separatist bases were established in Sabah and the Malaysian government has provided training and support to the separatists.

<sup>30</sup> Philippine Armed Forces Vice-chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Jose Calimlim, said that the MILF recently received US\$3 million from bin Ladin, in a Middle East country and through a MILF emissary, to buy new weapon. General Calimlim did not indicate the source of the information, but said that the Philippine military was closely coordinating with international law-enforcement agencies to monitor foreign financiers of the guerillas ("Official Charges Bin Laden With Arming Muslim Rebels," posted on 20 Jun. 2000 on the *Oversea Security Advisory Council [OSAC]* web site, [www.ds-osac.org/globalnews](http://www.ds-osac.org/globalnews)).

## **TERRORISM INSPIRED BY RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM**

The most notable religious extremist groups in Asia are the Abu Sayaa Group (ASG) in the Philippines and the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan. Although the immediate threat of these groups is usually to their home countries, they have the tendency to spread their influence to places with a social environment conducive to gaining more support, morally, physically, and financially for their cause.

The ASG and Aum represent religious groups created by two opposite social phenomena. Islamic fundamentalism, as advocated by the ASG, wants the people to return to basic ways of life spelled out in the *Koran*. A society that has a substantial number of Muslims tends to have such an inclination when it loses confidence in its present system. This inclination is even stronger when there is wide spread poverty, corruption, exploitation by the elites, and erosion of their own culture. When desires are not met, violence tends to erupt in the form of extremism. In addition, Islamic extremist proponents, such as the ASG, may feel duty-bound to assist fellow Muslims who are perceived, rightly or wrongly, to be oppressed.

On the contrary, cults like Aum usually stem from a highly developed and sophisticated society. Its members are predominantly well-educated and successful people. Many of them have become disillusioned about life amid a high-paced society that pursues endless material advancement and little spiritual enrichment. When wooed by a highly charismatic leader, with a well-constructed philosophy of life, a professed supernatural or divine power, or a crisis theory (such as Armageddon), they become possessed. They can be convinced to give up their individuality and all their possessions. Above that, they can be led to commit acts that defy normal human values, for the sake of a final destiny or enlightenment. That makes them highly



manipulatable and extremely dangerous. Moreover, designer drugs are often used to exert total control over them. Singapore does possess some characteristics that can attract the presence of cults like Aum, and the social problems and terrorist threats that come with them.

## **ABU SAYAAF GROUP**

The ASG is the smallest and most radical of the Islamic separatist groups operating in the Southern Philippines.<sup>31</sup> It is distinguished from other Muslim separatist groups because it embraces Islamic extremism. The ASG believes that all Christians, and even Muslims who do not follow its brand of Islam, are unbelievers and their elimination is encouraged.

The ASG's professed objective is to establish an independent Islamic Republic in the Southern Philippines, based on the Islamic law (*Shariah*). It wants Muslims there to follow Islam in its purest and strictest form, for it is allegedly the only path to Allah. It has reportedly attracted Muslim youth who have been disenchanted with both the government and the MNLF.

Ustadz Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, founding leader of ASG, strongly opposed the peace process between the Philippine government and the MNLF, which was essentially the finalizing and implementing of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement. That agreement called for the autonomy of thirteen of the Southern Philippine states with Muslim majorities. Janjalani, conversely, wanted an independent Islamic state. In 1991, he left the MNLF and formed the Abu Sayaaf Group (Arabic code meaning "Bearer of the Sword").<sup>32</sup> After its inception, the ASG jostled for leadership of the separatist movement. It tried to gain the attention of other Muslim

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<sup>31</sup> The Mujahidin Commando Freedom Fighters (MCFF), predecessor of the ASG, was organized in the mid-80's in Basilan by Ustadz Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani (trained in Libya). Other founders include Amilhussin Jumaani (trained in Iran) and Wahab Akbar (trained in Libya).

countries and to divert international funding support from the MNLF. Though the MNLF has officially disclaimed any link with the ASG, some MNLF elements in the Basilan are believed to be actively involved in the training of ASG members in guerrilla tactics, sabotage techniques, and demolition.

The ASG embraces violent struggle (*Jihad*) and rejects the practice of the complementary non-violent mobilization (*Dawa*). It believes that moderation of the struggle constitutes an inevitable acceptance of the MNLF's "concessions" to the State. Its choices of action, thus, reflected the wish of radical Muslims who perceived the ongoing peace process as a threat. Furthermore, the choice of sensational terrorist actions, like bombings and kidnappings of foreigners, placed the Abu Sayyaf's struggle on the international scene.<sup>33</sup>

The ASG's strength is concentrated in the Basilan and Sulu, but it operates throughout Mindanao. For the most part, ASG attacks have remained in the Southern Philippines. In February 1996, however, a grenade attack in the Makati business district of Manila wounded four persons and damaged the local headquarters of both Shell Corporation and Citibank. Police suspected the Abu Sayyaf Group and if that suspicion is correct, it may show the ASG's inclination towards attacking Western interests.

The ASG's activities include bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, and extortion from companies and wealthy businessmen. Its brutality towards innocent people and its choices of targets fully demonstrate its embracement of Islamic extremism. It advocates the complete annihilation of all non-Muslims, including women, children, and the elderly on Mindanao, and

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<sup>32</sup> Janjalani's was killed in a clash with the Philippine police on 18 Dec. 1998. After his death, a power struggle took place within the ASG, with the late leader's brother, Khadafy Janjalani, finally emerging as the new leader.

has carried out numerous atrocities to this end.<sup>34</sup> The group's first major terrorist operation was a grenade attack in 1991, in which two foreign women were killed. Subsequent attacks became more savage. On 8 Jun 1994, twenty-five armed men, led by Janjalani, stopped four vehicles carrying 74 passengers, mostly teachers, in Isabela, Basilan. All the Muslims were released, while 16 of the other captives were executed (the other twenty were released later). The most horrifying attacks, however, occurred in April 1995, in the Christian town of Ipil, Mindanao. About 200 terrorists razed the town center to the ground, shot fifty-three civilians and soldiers dead, wounding another forty-four, and escaping with twenty hostages as human shields to cover their retreat.<sup>35</sup>

The ASG finances its operations mainly through robbery, piracy, and ransom kidnappings. Also, big time smugglers in Basilan are believed to have provided high power firearms while local sympathizers provided food for them. The group has consistently targeted foreigners for kidnapping, but there is no apparent discrimination of nationality, as those kidnapped have included Spanish, American, Japanese, Hong Kong Chinese, Malaysians, Belgians, and others.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Christos Iacovou, Research Associate, Institute of Defense Analysis, Greece. *From MNLF to Abu Sayyaf: The Radicalization of Islam in the Philippines*, posted on the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) Web Page, [www.ict.org.il/](http://www.ict.org.il/), International Terrorism Section.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Chalk, p.19.

<sup>35</sup> Other ASG attacks include the following:

In 1992, Abu Sayyaf militants hurled a bomb at a wharf in the southern city of Zamboanga where the MV Doulous, an international floating bookstore manned by Christian preachers, was docked. Several people were injured. This attack was followed by similar bombings on the Zamboanga airport and Roman Catholic churches. In 1993, the group bombed a cathedral in Davao City, killing seven people. On 21 Jun. 94, a homemade bomb, believed to be planted by ASG, exploded inside the orchestra section of the Premier Theatre in Iligan city but no casualties were reported.

<sup>36</sup> Spanish priest Bernardo Blanco was kidnapped on 18 Mar. 1993 and American Charles Walton, on 14 Nov. 93. Father Blanco escaped to freedom after forty-eight days of captivity and Walton was freed after the Philippine government paid hundreds of dollars in "food assistance." A Japanese businessman and three Filipino boys were kidnapped in June 1997. A rescue operation by the Philippine military later freed the Japanese hostage.

The ASG's latest and most spectacular kidnapping, on 23 Apr. 2000, attracted worldwide attention. Twenty-one people, including French, German, South African, Malaysian, Filipino, and Finnish nationals, were kidnapped from the Malaysian diving resort of Sipadan Island. The hostages were taken to the rebels' mountain stronghold on Jolo Island, in the Sulu province of the Southern Philippines. Issues concerning ransom payment and negotiation created tremendous international political tension, dilemma, and embarrassment. A German media crew was even detained and had to redeem itself with cash when it visited the rebels to cover the event. The rebels received millions of dollars in ransom, including an alleged ten million dollars in "development aid" from Libya, who volunteered to negotiate for the hostages' release.<sup>37</sup> As negotiation was going on, the ASG announced the abduction of American Jeffrey Schilling. Interestingly, investigations suggest that Schilling could have been working with the ASG on a deal for firearms and night vision goggles, and had walked himself into the rebels' arms.<sup>38</sup> The ASG demanded for a US\$10 million ransom for his release, but the U.S. and Filipino government refused to pay. Schilling was subsequently rescued when Filipino police and military stormed an ASG's stronghold in the interior of Jolo on 12 Apr. 2001.

Although promising no more kidnappings during the negotiation, three more Malaysians were taken from another island. That was the last straw that drove the Philippine military into launching a campaign against the rebel positions on Jolo in mid-September 2000, which it believes has drastically reduced the strength of the Abu Sayaaaf terrorist group to only 75 to 200

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<sup>37</sup> The Libyan payment to the terrorists was to improve its international image. Libya has, for some time, refrained from openly supporting terrorism, though it was suspected that the ASG used to receive aid from it.

<sup>38</sup> The rebels held schilling, a Muslim convert, when he visited their camp in Jolo on Aug 31, with his wife, Ivy Osani, a cousin of the rebel leader Abu Sabaya. Ms Osani was freed after the rebels seized Schilling. The rebels threatened, on 5 Apr. 2001, to slay Schilling in order to denounce the speculation that the kidnapping was coordinated, but subsequently announced a postponement of the execution when the Filipino authority did not succumb to the ultimatum. Schilling, after being rescued, denied that he was in cahoots with the ASG, despite

hardcore members.<sup>39</sup> In the meantime, the MILF officially disassociated itself from the ASG during the assault, in order not to be drawn in. As of the time of this writing, all the hostages have been freed, except for a Filipino dive instructor.

It does not look like ASG is capable of inflaming the Singapore Muslim community with its Islamic fanaticism. There is, however, a good possibility that Singaporeans may some day be unfortunate victims of the ASG's criminal activities. The biggest concern, though, is ASG's connection with other Islamic extremist groups in the world. Some of its members have studied or worked in the Middle East and Janjalani, and many other members, were veterans of the Afghanistan war, just like members of the MILF. During their participation in the war, they developed close ties with many other Islamic radical groups.

Documents captured in the Philippines, during a police raid in January 1995, showed hard evidence of the ASG's connections to worldwide Islamic extremist groups. It also revealed the details of a series of planned terrorist attacks in the region. Besides, the ASG also receives funding from the international terrorist network of Usama bin Ladin. The ASG must have also impressed its contemporaries with its ruthlessness and its willingness to use violence. By the time of the Ipil attack, the group had forged links with international terrorist cells. It is, therefore, not inconceivable for the ASG to show its gratitude for the assistance it receives, voluntarily or on request, by attacking Singapore, or some Western interest in Singapore, as part of the global *jihad* against "the evil of capitalism and imperialism."

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confirming reports that he was carrying firearm while in captivity ("Freed US Hostage Schilling has a Hearty Meal," *Straits Times Interactive*, 17 Apr. 2001).

<sup>39</sup> *Straits Time Interactive (Singapore)*, 16 Nov. 2000.

## AUM SHINRIKYO

Aum's ultimate vision is to gain political control of Japan, and subsequently, the world. Apart from its unequaled quest for political power, its story is monotonously similar in many respects to other cult tales. Chizuo Matsumoto (Shoko Asahara's real name) grew up in poverty and dreamt regularly of a bright future. Seeking the power of position, he vied for leadership positions in student bodies at various stages of school, but failed each time. He even dreamt of becoming the Prime Minister.

Asahara found religion a powerful tool to realize his dream. He thus invented a religion of his own that appealed through a concoction of fanaticism, supernatural power, and Armageddon. To demonstrate his mystical power, he impressed potential believers with the help of the yoga technique of momentary levitation.<sup>40</sup> Gullible followers quickly multiplied, among them some of the brightest minds in Japan, with science and engineering backgrounds, but a vacuum in their spiritual world. They were specially targeted during recruitment. With those, a deadly cult was brewed.

Aum's money acquisition gathered pace through legal and illegal businesses, and most importantly, through endless extortions from its members. An age-old formula of intimidation, physical punishment, brainwashing, drugs, and preaching of prophecy was used to control the living dead under its spell. Disobeying members simply disappeared at times, some of whom ended up in a gigantic microwave cremator.

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<sup>40</sup> A modern Japanese religious sect, Agonshu, provided Asahara some ideas. Agonshu encouraged followers to cut all contacts with their families and promised the imparting of supernatural power. It also warned of an imminent Apocalypse (David E. Kaplan and Andrew Marshall, *The Cult at the End of the World*, page 10 – 11). This cocktail of fundamentalism, fantasy, and doomsday theory appealed to Asahara. He subsequently read extensively and traveled to many religious lands, and invented Aum.

Asahara bid for power during the 1990 election of the Japanese House of Representatives. Aum fielded twenty candidates, all of whom, including Asahara, suffered humiliating defeat, thus strengthening Asahara's antipathy towards society and leading him to look increasingly inwards. It is, perhaps, from that time that he turned increasingly terroristic (with the injection of political motive) as compared to his more criminal conduct previously.<sup>41</sup>

The cult also began militarizing, by recruiting military personnel, acquiring military knowledge, and procuring weapons, including Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). It went shopping worldwide and found the shattered and chaotic Soviet empire a perfect place both for its expansion of membership and for its militarization program. At its peak, Aum was reportedly commanding 20,000 followers in Russia, and a few dozens each in New York and Frankfurt. A concrete date for the imminent Armageddon was also announced to tighten the psychological grip, inject urgency, and hasten the arming. The intended date of the Armageddon showdown and the ushering in of the Apocalypse was set for November 1995.<sup>42</sup> Asahara also set up a shadow government, complete with ministries that mimicked the Japanese bureaucratic structure, to run the cult. He was truly obsessed with gaining political power.

Aum's top-notch gang of scientists and engineers, armed with a divine devotion to their leader, a sheer passion for science, and a lot of money, was able to set its sight on a wide variety of weapons, ranging from the most conventional guns and assault rifles to the deadliest WMD. These weapons were to come from their own research and development, production, or simply from purchase. The cult, in fact, had initial success in copying Russian assault rifles, the AK74.

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<sup>41</sup> After a temporary downturn following the election failure, Aum again grew steadily in size and absurdness, and inevitably in greed and arrogance. It began to invite attention from the public, and later, the authorities. Aum, however, managed to keep officials at arms' length by exploiting the authorities fear of accusation of religious prosecution, in a weary post-war Japan that champions absolute religious freedom. While the authorities tried in vain to infiltrate the secluded cult, the cult's tentacles penetrated police and government departments.

The scientists worked on electromagnetic, microwave, laser, and nuclear weapons. An earthquake machine was even thought about. There were also attempts to buy a nuclear warhead from Russia, and to mine and enrich uranium in Australia. Aum scientists were most deadly, however, in their success, undaunted after numerous failures, in developing a wide variety of chemical and biological weapons agents.

The cult was not hesitant to test its deadly creation on the innocent public or people in power. Several attempts to attack using biological toxin, including during the Japanese crown prince's wedding in 1993, failed because the toxin was not perfected. Then, sarin, the nerve gas, finally made its debut on 27 Jun 1994. While waiting for three judges to pass a ruling on a land dispute libel suit against Aum's new Matsumoto branch, Asahara decided to silence them. Sarin mist was sprayed from a reconstructed refrigerator truck in a neighborhood of Matsumoto. That incident killed seven people and injured 200 more, though the judges merely fell ill. The ensuing investigation, however, did not implicate Aum.<sup>43</sup>

In a desperate attempt to divert the attention of the police from an imminent raid on its facilities on 21 March 1995,<sup>44</sup> three briefcases packed with botulinus toxin, a deadly biological agent, and their dispensers were placed at the Kasamigaseki Subway Station. One of them emitted a harmless steam when picked up. It was said that the devices failed because the cultist deploying them did not arm the devices, because of a guilty conscience.

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<sup>42</sup> Recorded in a note by Asahara's right hand man, Hayakawa; *The Cult at the End of the World*, p.156.

<sup>43</sup> One of the victims was wrongly accused of accidentally releasing the gas, because of some chemical stocks found in his compound.

<sup>44</sup> Soil samples were taken from around Aum's compound in November 1994, after a neighborhood complaint of foul odor. Tests revealed traces of sarin in the soil identical to the Matsumoto attack. In addition, Aum was implicated in the disappearance of a notary public, Kiyoshi Kariya, after he persuaded his sister to leave Aum. Kariya left a note for his son saying, "if I disappear, I was abducted by the Aum Supreme Truth Sect," (David E. Kaplan and Andrew Marshall, page 227). The police, therefore, were forced to speed up investigation on Aum and Aum's spy in the police department warned the leader of the planned raid on its facilities.



On the deadly day of 20 March 1995 (the day before the planned police raid on Aum's facility), eleven bags of sarin liquid were placed on five different trains converging on the Kasumigaseki Station, the station nearest to the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department that was responsible for the investigation of Aum, and also the heart of the nation's government. The attack was carried out haphazardly, by piercing plastic bags of low-grade sarin, which emits a foul odor, with the sharpened tips of umbrellas. Twelve people were killed and 5,500 more injured. Japan was devastated with the news and Tokyo plunged into fear and chaos.

In hindsight, however, the subway attack could have been a much larger disaster, something closer to what Asahara had wished. Thousands of innocents were spared only because of the low-grade sarin used and the low-tech method of attack in this hastily induced Apocalypse.<sup>45</sup> Had Asahara been allowed to carry out his Armageddon plan meticulously according to his own time schedule, it could indeed have been a very dark time in Japan's history.

After those incidents, Aum facilities were raided nation-wide. Asahara's key lieutenants were arrested one after another. Attacks to thwart the investigation persisted, including an attack by hydrogen cyanide gas in the packed Shinjuku Subway Station. Fortunately there was no injury, because of the early discovery of the chemical device. Once again, thousands of people narrowly escaped potential tragic deaths. However, the police chief in charge of the investigation was almost assassinated with four gunshots, and the Tokyo governor received a letter bomb shortly after announcing his intention to revoke the cult's religious status. Though

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<sup>45</sup> This is partly due to Aum's destruction of its toxin stockpile in January 1995, in anticipation of a police raid, and partly due to the sudden turn of event that forced Aum to act in such a rush.

there is no concrete proof that Aum was behind these assassination attempts, one can not avoid making the obvious connection.

The self-professed guru, Asahara, was finally arrested at his Mount Fuji complex on 16 May 1995, the fifty-sixth day of the raid against Aum. He now faces ten indictments, including twenty-three counts of murder. The court stripped the cult of its religious status, taking away some of its privileges, such as huge tax cuts and certain protection against police scrutiny, and liquidated its remaining assets. The government, however, did not prosecute the cult under the *Sedition Act*,<sup>46</sup> probably out of the concern for the likelihood of tarnishing Japan's reputation as a stable and democratic nation.<sup>47</sup> It instead designated Aum Shinrikyo as a violent organization, subjected to surveillance, but not outlawed.

While Asahara's remains in custody, his followers continue to worship him. Aum also seems to be thriving again, with the return of many of its veteran members, including Fumihiro Joyu, a cult spokesman and one its most popular leaders who was released from jail in November 1998. In 1997 and 1998 the cult resumed its recruiting activities in Japan and opened several commercial businesses.<sup>48</sup> In a recent report to the Japanese Cabinet, Public Security Investigation Agency official accounted that Aum, which renamed itself Aleph in January 2000, currently has twenty-nine regional branches and training centers, about 200 accommodation facilities, 650 full-time leaders and teachers, and more than 1000 followers throughout Japan. He also said that Aum attempts to conceal its organizational management by utilizing

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<sup>46</sup> The *Sedition Act* is meant for subduing politically subversive organization, such as communist group.

<sup>47</sup> "Terror in the Heart of Japan: A New Form of Terrorism is Unleashed," *The Japan Times Special Report*.

<sup>48</sup> Japanese security officials also reported a rise in Aum Shinrikyo membership and business activities in 1998. Their property acquisitions, however, provoked numerous police raids and an extensive public backlash, which included protests and citizen-led efforts to monitor and barricade Aum's facilities. In an effort to alleviate public pressure and criticism, Aum leaders announced that the group would suspend its public activities for an indeterminate period, beginning on 1 Oct. 1999 (Global Pattern 1999, p.11).

telecommunication systems such as the Internet and video conferencing to relay its orders, manage and teach its members.<sup>49</sup> It is not clear what Aum's present overseas membership status is. Some branches in Russia are reportedly the only few that survived 1995 and still hold a modest pool of followers. Aum, nevertheless, maintains an Internet homepage that continues to preach Armageddon and anti-US sentiment. The cult also has a new date for Armageddon, the year 2003, which means that it might not be far from a new wave of extremism.<sup>50</sup>

There are two startling points that stand out in this entire drama, namely the debut of high-tech terrorism using WMD and the formidability of terrorism relating to religious fanaticism. Aum made history in becoming the first ever non-state group capable of mass producing WMD and attacking with them. Its uncontrolled and indiscriminate violence, associated with religiously inspired terrorism, aimed for massive casualties. That is a contrast to regular political terrorism where publicity is more desirable than body count. These are concerns that grip and worry the world's terrorism experts, not just Singapore.

Singapore has, in some ways, a resemblance to the Japanese societal conditions that gave birth to the notorious Aum Shinrikyo cult. The people are well educated and relatively wealthy. Life is fast-paced and material wealth is high on many people's priority, leaving little time and energy for the enhancement of one's spiritual well being. Education, similarly, is a very stressful process for the young people and the system is rather unsympathetic to failures. The availability of high technology infrastructure and highly trained people, as well as a leading research community of life science and petroleum chemical products, are also among tendencies that may interest a cult group toying with high-tech terrorism and WMD.

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<sup>49</sup> "Aum Cult Still a Danger, Warns Japanese Government," *Straits Times Interactive (Singapore)*, 17 Apr. 2001.

<sup>50</sup> Ely Karmon, *The Anti-Semitism of Japan's Aum Shinrikyo: A Dangerous Revival*. Posted on 15 Oct. 1999 on the ICT Web Page, [www.ict.org.il/](http://www.ict.org.il/), International Terrorism section.

Singapore, however, possesses equally dissuasive characters, such as effective, versus efficient, law enforcement and “non-absolute” freedom of religion. While Singapore’s Constitution (Article 15, Fundamental Liberties) provides for “Freedom of Religion,” it is stern against any act contrary to any general law relating to public order, public health, or morality. The 1990 “Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act” also made illegal what the government deems to be inappropriate involvement of religious groups and officials in political affairs.

Aum’s terrorist attacks were directed at the Japanese government and its police force. It has no good reason to attack a foreign country, unless it is operating there and its operation is interfered with. It has also not deliberately targeted foreigners. Cults also try to avoid negative publicity, which can trigger a crackdown on their other lucrative activities. In that sense, the cult must first take root in any place before there exists a reason for it to terrorize. Fortunately, there has not been any report regarding Aum or other similar cult trying to operate in Singapore. For the immediate future, therefore, Singapore is unlikely to be directly affected by any cult.

## **INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM**

As the dust settles after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, international conflict begins to take on a new form. As hypothesized by Samuel Huntington, the next round of conflict will center on *the clash of civilizations*. One implication of this hypothesis, as endless evidence has shown, is the replacement of political ideology by ethnic and religious differences as the source of conflict, and hence, terrorism. Religiously provoked terrorism, as compared to ethnically inspired terrorism, has more tendencies to ignore national borders and to transcend regional boundaries, in the form of a holy war. Religious extremism has, therefore, become the prime

motivator of international terrorism. In addition, sub-state players will likely replace nation states as the main perpetrators of terrorism.

Between Islamic and Western cultures, there are many fundamental differences in moral values, ways of life, and interpretation of rights. Western liberalness in social behavior and lavishness in capitalistic lifestyle are often viewed as corruptive. Moreover, at its present peak of power and influence, the West is often over zealous in championing its culture and superiority. In today's world "shrunk" by globalization and the information age, it is no longer possible to shield oneself from the influence of other cultures.

The other major source of antagonism is the West's support of Israel, an Arabs' archenemy, in the Middle East conflicts. Out of this, extremism tends to develop along the fault lines between Islam and the West. Religious extremism, as proven time and again, can easily justify the use of violence through a law of higher order. Consequently, terrorism is often viewed as a legitimate tool to achieve its cause.

Western countries, especially the U.S., which is often seen as "the mother of all capitalist evils," and their allies are undoubtedly prone to attack in a holy war. Improvised bombs, for example, were exploded, in 1985 and 1986, in the vicinity of the Israeli embassy in Singapore. The creation of a worldwide network of Islamic extremists, thus, raised much concern. This network has already demonstrated its interest in operating in the region, as close to Singapore as to the Philippines. Indonesia may well be another hotbed for terrorist bases, because of its political crisis, widespread chaos, and resurrection of Islamic fundamentalism. The *Mujahidin* arrested for the recent bombing in Jakarta is a constant reminder to the region of their continued presence.

Both Philippine and Western intelligence officials now firmly believe that the ASG, possibly in conjunction with renegade elements from the MILF, has facilitated the creation of local logistics bases for transnational Islamic organizations, in return for the supply of arms and financing. Their purpose is supposedly to transform the Philippines, especially its capital Manila, into a base for terrorist activities directed against Western, particularly American, interests and anti-Islamic elements in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>51</sup> Captured and verified evidence also revealed the details of a sophisticated plan<sup>52</sup> to carry out a series of high profile international terrorist attacks in 1995, to include synchronized bombings of the US and Israeli embassies in the Philippines and other Asian capitals.<sup>53</sup> Documents captured<sup>54</sup> showed that the network has established comprehensive links with worldwide Islamic militants: Mohammed Jamal Khalifa,<sup>55</sup> the Abu Nidal Organisation (ANO), Hizbollah in Lebanon, Hamas cells in Gaza and the West Bank, Gama'a el-Islamiya in Egypt, and the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS).<sup>56</sup>

The establishment of a base for this network of the world's most radical religious extremists, especially when it is so close to home, increases the likelihood of terrorist attacks.

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Chalk, p.18.

Concrete evidence first appeared in the material seized in the Philippines during the January 1995 raid on a flat rented to Ramzi Ahmed Yousef – a freelance terrorist with links to the radical Egyptian group Al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya and indicted for masterminding the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. In conjunction with the ASG operations, they were to “turn the democratic Philippines into a major center of international terrorism.”

<sup>52</sup> Verified by Wala Khan, the apprehended Islamic militant during the raid. Ramzi Yousef was not in the flat during the raid. He was, however, arrested later in Islamabad, Pakistan in 1995 and extradited to the United States.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Chalk, p.18.

The plan also included many other high profile attacks:

- a. The assassination of the Pope during his visit to Manila in 1995.
- b. The mid-air destruction of two United Air Lines 747 jumbo jets over Hong Kong's Kai Tak airport by exploding a nitroglycerine bomb hidden in the upper-deck washrooms of each plane. The scheme was 'tested' by bombing a Philippines Airlines jet on route to Tokyo in December 1994, killing one and injuring 10.
- c. Suicide assaults on the headquarters of both the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in Manhattan and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Virginia.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Chalk, p.19. Captured from Yousef's flat and later confirmed by military intelligence, as well as the testimony of Edwin Angeles, a former ASG operative and now Philippine police informant.

<sup>55</sup> An Arab businessman who is believed to have played a key role in helping to co-ordinate the activities of Islamic extremists in Pakistan, Egypt, Israel and the US.

<sup>56</sup> Political wing of the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) in Algeria.

Attacks can now be better prepared and coordinated; recruitment, training, and criminal support activities can possibly create endless problems; motives of attack can become highly irrational due to a more complex constitution, as compared to the original separatism cause. Moreover, the terrorists' links to their safe havens in Pakistan, Syria, or Afghanistan provide them with resources and refuge. Weapons are probably more obtainable too.

With a terrorist base in the jungle, weapons can be amassed more easily. The interception of an arms cache in Cebu in August 1996, which included modern weapons and explosives, can testify to that.<sup>57</sup> It is also not too difficult to acquire weapons and other terrorist materials from the battlefield of Afghanistan, Cambodia, and the collapsed Soviet empire. A pool of well-trained and under-employed military specialists is also available. Even the acquiring of WMD, as demonstrated in the Aum Shinrikyo experience, is not unimaginable. What the terrorists need is money.

The MILF in the Philippines has recently confirmed publicly that it has received financial support, which it claimed was used for community work, from Usama bin Ladin, who has been accused of masterminding some of the bloodiest terrorist attacks, including the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, killing at least 301 persons and injuring more than 5,000 others. Bin Ladin was also implicated in the bombing of the U.S. Navy destroyer, USS Cole, on 9 October 2000, in Aden, Yemen, killing seventeen crewmembers and injuring 39 others. He is currently the most wanted terrorist of the U.S. He issued a *Fatwa* in February

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<sup>57</sup> Peter Chalk. According to the Philippine military and intelligence sources, the weapons, which included a M-16 rifle, a .22 caliber rifle, a 12-gauge shotgun, a 9mm pistol, and a homemade .357 caliber handgun in addition to hundreds of rounds of assorted ammunition, fragmentation grenades, claymore mines, dynamite and other explosives were part of an armory being readied for a regionally organized attack on the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit which was held at the former US Philippine Subic Naval Base, in November 1996. The US and the Philippine security officials believe that the attack was to have been coordinated by a group of four

1998, asking Muslims worldwide to attack American interests, saying that it was the duty of all Muslims to kill US citizens, civilian or military, and their allies everywhere. Considering the monetary support he has given and can continue to provide, it is highly possible that militants in the region will return his favor or heed his call.

Singapore has one of the highest concentrations of Western, including American, interest and citizens in the region. Infrastructures range from high profile embassies and military bases to high value or potentially destructive industries sitting in vulnerable, outlying islands. It is also home to the busiest seaport and one of the busiest airports in the world, through which countless foreign goods and nationals pass each day. Reinforced by the guarantee of a worldwide beaming of headline news from this modern regional communication hub, it is indeed an area of potential terrorist attack worth considering. Such a threat is, obviously, amplified by its proximity to a terrorist base.

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Islamic militants who had entered the country in September 1996 on Pakistani passports, allegedly to head up an international terrorist ring that linked Muslim extremists both regionally and internationally.



## **SINGAPORE'S VULNERABILITIES**

Why would terrorists want to attack Singapore or operate in Singapore? A high concentration of Western interests and Singapore's capitalist and pro-Western policies are among factors that increase its susceptibility to terrorist attacks. As an international information hub that can provide worldwide broadcast of an attack, Singapore can also appeal to terrorists. As a small nation that does not have a lot of capability or political power to retaliate, foreign terrorists are more likely to believe that they can get away with their deed unpunished. Singapore's regular hosting of foreign heads of state and government delegations also increases the possibility of terrorist attacks on its soil. Finally, as one of the world major financial centers, it has a good infrastructure that terrorists can exploit for their financial activities.

A large number of the high value industries, many of which belong to large multinational companies, are located on vulnerable islands facing international water. They are mainly petrol-chemical plants or oil refineries, which are highly volatile and easily destroyed. In addition, it is extremely difficult to provide security for them against attackers infiltrating from surrounding water. They are, therefore, vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

Singapore is also competing fiercely to be a regional financial center. Its financial and banking regulations are therefore very liberal, allowing financial institutions to maintain their edge. In this respect, Singapore can conceivably be used by terrorist organizations for their support activities, similar to the situation of bin Ladin's money passing through banks in the U.S.

In addition, the Singapore airline flies to ninety cities in more than forty different countries, including many airports in troubled regions such as the Middle East and Southeast

Asia. With airport security usually determined by the host countries, terrorists can easily find an airport where security is lax. That greatly increases the possibility of a hijacking or attack on the planes. A civilian commercial airplane, being a high value, versatile, and easily controlled asset, will continue to be the terrorists' favorite. Moreover, hijacking a plane can be done far away from Singapore's efficient law enforcement authorities.

Singapore is also a regional center for tourist cruises. Though it is difficult to control a ship, due to its size and complex interior, it can be attacked by a bomb smuggled aboard in luggage, or by divers, as demonstrated by the LTTE. A sunken cruise ship can yield a large body count, if that is the terrorist's desired result.

Finally, Singapore's reliance on information technologies and digital networking has created a new and alarming vulnerability. Though there has not been an attack on this technology, Singapore is becoming increasingly susceptible. In the last six months, the country's largest bank, DBS, twice experienced computer breakdowns that crippled almost all its banking and associated services. This simple example allows speculation on the possible leverage a terrorist can have with a cyber network attack. With more and more essential services dependent on computer networks, such as power grids, air traffic control, public transport systems, and military bases, this threat cannot be ignored. Moreover, one of the reasons crimes and terrorist attacks are kept at a low level in Singapore is the effective law enforcement and its deterring punishments. Cyber terrorism, besides being extremely difficult to track down, allows a terrorist to attack from a place beyond the judiciary of the Singapore's law enforcers. Moreover, laws governing cyberspace are still at their infancy, with loopholes that terrorists can possibly exploit to their advantage.

## **CONCLUSION: ANTI-WEST ATTACK IS THE LIKELY THREAT**

Asia will invariably remain troubled by ethnic/religious separatism and its associated terrorism, the biggest concern for the region as a whole. This form of terrorism, however, is likely to remain within the border of the host country, except for its supporting activities. The next level of concern to the region is probably terrorism related to political violence, and this has considerable possibility of spilling over to Singapore. Conversely, terrorism related to communist insurgencies does not appear to pose any significant threat, except to the Philippines and Nepal.

With the Singapore government's regionalization and globalization drive, Singaporeans and their properties are present worldwide, including in some intensely troubled spots. Therefore, the possibility of Singaporeans suffering collateral damages or injuries from terrorist attacks unrelated to Singapore is plausible. This is especially true for attacks related to ethnic/religious separatism and political party rivalries, which are common in Asia, including Singapore's neighbors in Southeast Asia.

Singapore's well-developed, world-class financial institutions may appeal to terrorist groups conducting criminal activities in support of their causes. This is true for all terrorist types. Ethnic/religious separatists are also likely to raise fund in Singapore, because of the presence of local sympathizers. The support of the Sikh terrorists and the LTTE are good examples of this. Nonetheless, as mentioned before, these support activities does not constitute a terrorist attack, unless violence is involved. Also, the stringent law and its strict enforcement are likely to make big-scale plots unsustainable, and to deem violent practices, such as kidnapping,

unprofitable in Singapore. It is the kidnapping for ransom phenomenon in the other parts of the Southeast Asia region, so far practiced by the ASG, MILF, CPP/NPA, and the “Free Papua Movement,” which is a likely threat to Singaporeans.

With Singapore’s careful diplomacy and its policy of non-interference, its government should remain an unlikely direct target of a terrorist attack. The most likely exception is international terrorists waging a holy war against the West or Israel, and their allies, because of Singapore’s close relationship with these countries. Moreover, Singapore’s unambiguous support for the U.S. military presence in the region, and its day-to-day military cooperation with the American, can be bitterly resented and greatly raise the potential of Singapore as a terrorist target, as during the Gulf War.

Being a small country, perceived to have very little means to counter or retaliate militarily and diplomatically, Singapore may be chosen as a target of indirect attack. Its comprehensive communications network, with links to the world round the clock, also suit a terrorist who aspires for publicity. In addition, as an international convention center, Singapore frequently holds high profile events, such as the WTO inaugural meeting in 1995 attended by many of the world leaders. All these, unfortunately, increase the possibility of terrorist attack.

Singapore houses one of the highest concentrations of multi-national, especially Western, economic interests in the region. More than 3,000 multinational corporations from the United States, Japan, and Europe operate in the tiny island state, of which, almost half are American. The failed bombing of the Shell petroleum refinery on Bukom Island in 1974 is a good example

of those interests becoming a terrorist target. In that attack, the Japanese Red Army<sup>58</sup> rigged the refinery with explosives sufficient to create a big spectacle. Fortunately, technical failure foiled the attempt. The terrorists then took some hostages and eventually secured their safe passage out of the country using the hostages as a human shield.<sup>59</sup>

The possibility of a terrorist attack on Singapore as a result of political party rivalries elsewhere, similar to the 1991 hijacking of the Singapore Airline's plane, will continue to be significant, because of Singapore's proximity and connectivity with a region full of emerging democracies, plagued by widespread political instability. However, it is international terrorists and religious extremists who will present the biggest terrorist threat to Singapore, because of the Islamic extremist network established in the nearby Philippines, Malaysia, or Indonesia. In this age of worldwide hostility between Islamic radicals and Western nations, a main cause of international terrorism, Singapore is in danger of becoming caught in the cross fire, because of its pro-Western attitude and the abundance of Western targets on its soil. It is, therefore, my assessment that the next terrorist attack on Singapore will most likely be carried out by an international terrorist group, probably religiously motivated, attacking some Western interest.

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<sup>58</sup> The arrest of a few key members of the JRA in recent years reduced known operatives of the group to less than a dozen, inclusive of four still in exile in North Korea. In addition, the apprehension in Osaka of its founder, Fusako Shigenobu, in November 2000, seems to have effectively made the terrorist group impotent.

<sup>59</sup> JRA, in fact, issued a statement of apology subsequently, stating that its targets were not Singapore, but the Western capitalist interests.

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